

Town Administrator Search Committee Final Report

Summary

After a thorough review and careful consideration, the Town Administrator Search Committee is proud to submit the following finalists to the Board for their consideration. These candidates were selected by a unanimous vote of the committee.

- Candidate 4
- Candidate 22

By virtue of their education, training and experience, we believe these candidates are uniquely qualified to be the next Town Administrator for Ashburnham. Interim Town Administrator, Sylvia Turcotte, has the “rosetta stone” to identify the candidates by name. Although the finalists know that they have been so selected, their names have not been made public by the committee. That task was viewed to be better performed by the Board and that should be done as soon as feasible. The finalists also know that the interviews by the Board will take place on Thursday, September 15 at 6:30 p.m. It is left to the board to set the interview format, durations, and start times and communicate same to the finalists. To assist the Board in the development of interview questions, the questions posed by the Committee, and other questions considered by the Committee have been sent to Acting Town Administrator, Sylvia Turcotte.

The Committee strongly suggests that a comprehensive background check be made on the tentatively selected candidate by a person familiar with that process. A release by the candidate is required.

Since one of our finalists is also a finalists in other communities, we suggest that the Board act with deliberate speed in the selection, background check and contract finalization process.

The Committee is appreciative of the opportunity to have served the Town in this critical selection.

Background

Following the announcement by Town Administrator Douglas Briggs of his impending retirement, the Board of Selectmen advertised the soon-to-be-open position in the MMA publication “The Beacon” beginning July 19. The ad stated that resumes would be accepted until August 31, 2016.

Candidates for the position were received by Executive Assistant, Sylvia Turcotte, who in turn sent an acknowledgement of receipt to each candidate informing them of the selection timeline.

The Board of Selectmen solicited volunteers to serve on the search committee, and after reviewing the self-nominations, in late June appointed Larry Barrett, Mary Calandrella, Dave Christianson, Joe Kalagher, Lorraine DeSouza, Gary Guertin, Walt Meissner, Randy Ramsdell, Ed Vitone and Bruce Whitney. Ed Vitone was asked to serve as chairman by the Board.

Town Administrator Search Committee Final Report

Initial Planning

The chairman sent background material to the committee in June and July and the first meeting for the committee was held on August 10.

Minimum qualifications for the Town Administrator position were reviewed from Section 5 of the Town Charter, namely “. . . the town administrator shall be a person especially suited by education, training and experience to perform the duties of the office and shall be appointed without regard to his political affiliations or beliefs . . .the town administrator shall possess a college degree at the bachelor level and shall have had 3 years of full-time, paid experience in a supervisory administrative position, a portion of which, either full-time or part-time, shall have been in the public sector. A master’s degree may substitute for not more than 1 year of such paid experience.”

The committee then reviewed a consolidated list of Screening Attributes that had been submitted to Ed Vitone prior to the meeting. After discussion, a few new attributes were added to the list. Each member then selected five (5) attributes that were felt to be the most important to them. The “votes” were tallied, and after considerable discussion, the committee developed five (5) key attributes that were felt to represent an ideal town administrator. These Attributes would be used to evaluate the applicants. These key attributes are listed below:

- Strong financial expertise with solid understanding of municipal finances, budget planning and preparation
- A creative and visionary leader who is able to identify and address the strategic needs of the community and the tactical steps necessary to deliver services
- Must possess a tool kit anchored with integrity and honesty, be easily approachable and have outstanding communication/listening skills.
- Must have solid and relevant experience
- Must have a passion to succeed coupled with a commitment to grow

Since receipt of resumes for the position had fallen off dramatically, on August 11 resumes for 28 applicants were distributed to each committee member. Between August 11 and August 31, three additional resumes were received and were distributed to the committee upon receipt. To protect the confidentiality of the applicants, each candidate was assigned a number.

Initial Screening

Between August 11 and September 1, the committee members individually reviewed the resumes against the Screening Attributes and tentatively selected candidates for interview. Of the 31 applicants, 12 were deemed not to meet the minimum requirements defined in the Town Charter, leaving 19 qualified candidates. One candidate withdrew, and of the remaining 18 candidates, 12 were selected for discussion.

The Committee met on September 1 to discuss each of the candidates selected by the members. There was clear agreement on three candidates, and after considerable discussion, two additional candidates were selected for interview.

Interview Questions & Format

The committee then discussed the type and number of questions to be asked during the interview. It was decided that approximately six (6) comprehensive questions would be asked which would require compressive answers. Follow up questions would follow each question. Candidate questions were developed and were associated with the desired candidate attributes.

The format of the interviews was then developed as follows.

- 1 hour interview
- Introduction by Committee
- Opening statement by candidate
- 5 or 6 broad questions
- Closing Statement by candidate

Two candidate interviews were held on Wednesday September 8 and three held on Thursday September 8. After the interviews on September 8 the Committee discussed each candidate and felt that Candidates 4 and 22 were worthy finalists.

Respectfully submitted for the Search Committee
Ed Vitone – September 8, 2016

Questions Asked by Search Committee

Introduction

Opening Statement

Questions

- **Attribute:** Must have solid and relevant experience
 - **Question 1:** Why do you want this job in Ashburnham, how did your prior experience prepare you to do an outstanding job here, and how does it help you achieve your short and long term goals
- **Attribute:** A creative and visionary leader who is able to identify and address the strategic needs of the community and the tactical steps necessary to deliver services
 - **Question 2:** What was the toughest problem that you faced and how did you solve it
- **Attribute:** Must have a passion to succeed coupled with a commitment to grow
 - **Question 3:** Tell us something that you failed on, what did you learn from that experience, and how did you later put that knowledge to good use
- **Attribute:** Strong financial expertise with solid understanding of municipal finances, budget planning and preparation
 - **Question 4:** You are preparing next year's budget and there has been essentially no new growth in the town in the recent past. Your current year budget is tight. The state hopes to hold local and school aid level, but that is not a sure thing. Contractual obligations in both the town and the school will cause a 4% increase in the total budget. The town's track record in approving budget overrides has been poor. Given this scenario, how would you go about your budget preparations?
 - **Follow up:** How does Ashburnham's budget compare to (*your town's*) budget in size and complexity and how will you manage the differences?
- **Attribute:** Must possess a tool kit anchored with integrity and honesty, be easily approachable and have outstanding communication/listening skills.
 - **Question 5:** This job requires someone who is both decisive and a consensus builder. Please explain when you would use one vs. the other and examples of each
- **Other**
 - **Question 6:** As the headwaters to three major watersheds, Ashburnham contains considerable pristine natural resources and is considered a destination spot for thousands of visitors and summer residents each year. While this is a blessing, it also introduces considerable challenges. Which administrative tools would you employ to ensure the protection of these waterways, resources and recreational opportunities? Please site an example of how you have achieved this and where you may have failed to do so and why.
 - **Question 7:** What questions did we not ask that you think we should have
 - **Question 8:** What questions do you have of us?

Closing Statement

Questions from Massachusetts Recruitment Guidelines Handbook

1. Describe your background and experience. What have been the areas of emphasis?
2. How does your experience qualify you for this position?
3. Have you had experience in all areas of local government service? If you have not had experience in certain areas, how would you approach management in these areas?
4. What experience do you have with budget preparation and finance?
5. What experience do you have with personnel and labor relations?
6. How do you work with the news media?
7. How do you describe your management style?
8. What is your experience as a supervisor? How many people have you supervised?
9. Have you ever had to terminate an employee? What process did you follow?
10. What are your thoughts on performance evaluation? What process do you follow to set objectives and monitor performance?
11. How will you go about assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and identifying opportunities to improve?
12. How do you approach the planning process? What system do you use to set objectives and priorities?
13. What is important to you in establishing effective working relations with others?
14. How do you view the relationship between the administrator and governing body? How do you view your relationship with department heads and local government staff?
15. What techniques have you found to be most successful in assisting local government officials establish and implement long- and short-range goals for the community?
16. To what extent do you believe contact with citizens and citizen groups is important? How do you typically handle this responsibility?
17. What experience have you had working on an intergovernmental or interagency basis? Have you worked directly with the state and federal governments, councils of governments, and other units of local government?
18. What will your first steps be upon assuming responsibility for this position? What do you hope to accomplish in the first year?
19. From your limited vantage point, what do you believe to be the challenges and opportunities facing our organization? How is this likely to change in the future?
20. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
21. Why are you interested in this position?
22. What are your expectations with respect to compensation?
23. What questions do you have of us [reference here is to members of the governing body]?

Town Administrator Search Committee Final Report

Email Sent to Each Interview Candidate

Candidate's Name

Congratulations on being selected for an interview. You will meet with the committee on *Day*, September *Date* at *Time* p.m. in our Public Safety Building located at 99 Central Street, Ashburnham. Park in front of the building and enter the main lobby. The dispatcher (behind the glass window) will direct you to the police waiting room on the right side of the lobby. I will meet you there and escort you to the interview.

As we discussed, the interview will last approximately one (1) hour and the format will be as follows:

- Committee introductions
- Opening statement by you
- Approximately 6 detailed questions with follow-ups likely
- Closing statement by you

You will be notified with the results of your interview either the evening of September 8 (if time permits) or Friday September 9.

Assuming that the search committee finds a suitable candidate(s), a meeting with the “finalists” will be held by the Board of Selectmen in the evening of Thursday, September 15. You should hold this date open. If an administrator is chosen by the selectmen, the position will be subject to an extensive background check (permission by candidate required) and successful contract negotiations.

We look forward to meeting you next week.

Please acknowledge receipt of this email.

Regards

Signee